

# Positive School-Family Partnerships = Student Success

NM Engaged Framework is a tool to help schools strengthen the home-school connection

**CONTRIBUTOR:** Mandi Torrez, Teacher Liaison, NMPED Community Engagement Team

When we think of education reform, big hitters such as funding and standardized testing come to mind. We often leave out one of the most important keys to successful schools and successful students: personal relationships.

Strong family engagement practices take center stage in the Multi-Layered Systems of Support (MLSS) framework, which calls for us to see parents as equal partners and to share responsibility for student outcomes. While the school provides information and resources for the family to navigate interventions, the family can provide critical insight and data to help inform student needs and progress.

Studies indicate that students with “involved” parents (or caregivers) are more likely to earn higher grades, graduate, go on to post-secondary education, and have stronger social skills—all things educators and families alike hope that students get from each year of learning. Helping schools build strong home-school relationships is the aim of the [New Mexico Engaged framework](#).

Teachers from around the state have reported an increased level of communication and stronger partnerships with many parents during the months of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet we also have parents who are disengaged. It is up to schools to repair relationships by creating

a welcoming environment and by building a respectful, inclusive school community.

Relationship building begins even before first contact with families. It calls upon educators to examine how we “show up” in our school or classroom. Acknowledging cultural biases and understanding how personal experiences affect our interactions with students and families can be a difficult process, but it is important to remember that we are all products of our environment. We cannot change that, but we can control how we accept our identities and we can choose to explore our ways of thinking and continue to grow.

## The Path Forward for Schools and Communities

NM Engaged provides a road map for schools to grow through a sustained, intentional effort that gives families many opportunities to participate. This seven-step process includes everything from assessing your school’s current practice to checking in with stakeholders for feedback. This process can be used for each area in which schools should focus: efforts at welcoming families, communication practices, student support, speaking up for every child, sharing leadership and collaboration with the community.



### IN THIS ISSUE:

- Positive School-Family Partnerships=Student Success .... 1
- MLSS and Parent Engagement ..... 3
- Parent and Family Engagement when Providing Layered Supports ..... 5

An advisory council, such as an Equity Council, is a great way to ensure that the identities of all stakeholders are meaningfully included in a school's work. A council should have a clearly defined and published role that allows for input on a wide range of issues such as instruction and curriculum, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), discipline policies, family workshops, and school and district budgets. The council can develop creative ways to involve families and, where appropriate, can also coordinate with workforce development boards or vocational education advisory councils to connect students and academic programs to business resources and opportunities. A council serves as the champion for students in building community support and encouraging greater community participation in a school.

Community partnerships should support a school's literacy efforts and initiatives. This could include family literacy events, workshops for families on how to support students at home, mentorship programs, extended learning opportunities, and grants. Community organizations can be invited to regularly celebrate the students' and school's progress.

## Classroom Practices

At the classroom level, MLSS will be successful when schools adopt a standardized process in which teachers clearly communicate a student's progress at least once every two weeks. Families also should be informed of changes to instruction/interventions based on progress. School leaders should regularly review progress-monitoring systems to evaluate their effectiveness in helping students, teachers, and families monitor interventions and to determine if interventions are producing their intended results.

Students also need to be active participants and should be aware of their academic and behavioral goals. They should be able to effectively lead their own data conference with the teacher and family.

The NM Engaged framework and MLSS should work in tandem, as strong partnerships with families and teachers help craft a full picture of a student's circumstances. When schools and

families openly share information, we can craft a clear profile of the whole child and structure supports that are culturally relevant and targeted to student needs.

## Resources

You can use this [resources toolkit](#) in creating an engagement plan. Here also are a few ideas for jumping into family engagement practices:

- » Use **social media** to get information on parent concerns and then hold Zoom meetings to address those exact concerns.
- » Implement **weekly communications** like "Monday Memos" to keep parents informed of what is happening at the district or school level.
- » Encourage educators to reach out to parents with **positive news**.
- » Focus on **families' strengths** and find ways to utilize them. For example, take time to discover talents or skills that parents might have and be willing to share in a classroom or school activity.
- » Utilize many **modes of communication** and consider **language needs**: emails, texts, newsletters, phone calls, phone apps, notes, class websites, social media platforms.

We must remember that ALL families want their children to succeed. While success may look or sound different to different families, based on their own cultural values and experiences, schools should validate and affirm a family's vision for their child while bridging to a diverse array of opportunities and outcomes.



# MLSS and Parent Engagement

Family Engagement is one of the Multi-Layered System of Supports (MLSS) Core Components.

On page 8 of the [NMPED MLSS Manual 2020](#), Family Engagement is described as follows:

Family engagement underlies all other MLSS components. Family participation in the MLSS process is essential for interventions to achieve their intended impact on student learning. The school provides support to families through the MLSS, so parents and families understand the process for moving up and down increasingly intensive layered interventions and can support the interventions.

We often hear the term Family Engagement used interchangeably with the term Family Involvement. However, when you explore the meanings behind the terms you discover there is a vast difference. According to the Office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) of the Philadelphia School District, **“involvement implies DOING TO; in contrast, engagement implies DOING WITH. A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for family engagement, on the other hand, tends to lead with its EARS—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners.”**

There are many examples of how we involve parents and caregivers in our schools. Examples include:

- Creating a welcoming environment;
- Providing information to parents about school events;
- Sending home information about supporting their child’s learning goals at home or providing parents with information regarding homework policies or grading practices;
- Conferences, festivals or celebrations; and
- Volunteer opportunities.



Often these pieces of information are related to parents via one-way communication by email, by phone, or by sending information home with the child. This is not a bad thing. Parents need to be informed about the activities, everyday routines, and policies in a school system.

However, parent engagement as it relates to MLSS is so much more. MLSS emphasizes the importance of open, or two-way, communication channels when engaging families and creating partnerships with them in our schools. In other words, we must build the relationships with our families first. When we listen to our families, we understand their needs, and listening to them is a great place to begin building relationships. Building relationships with parents means taking the time to listen to understand their cultural lens, their perspective on education, and parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about family engagement. Listening helps to an increase in trust, leading to increase family engagement which results in better systems to serve the whole child in our schools.

Here are two videos to watch describing how two teachers build relationships with parents in their schools:

- » Enjoy this [TED talk with Megan Olivia Hall on “Building Relationships Between Parents and Teachers.”](#)
- » Watch this quick video of [Dr. Danny Brassell as he shares “A Secret Strategy Teachers can use to Boost Parent Involvement.”](#)

Here is another resource that provides ideas for creating strong communications with families. The link below will take you to the Regional Educational Laboratory Program website.

- » On this site, you will find a toolkit for [Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education.](#)

There are other ways to provide opportunities to increase family engagement in schools that provide tools for parents to apply what they learn to support learning at home. There are also many resources to consult on this topic as well.

» Watch this video from the NMPED about [Family Engagement](#).

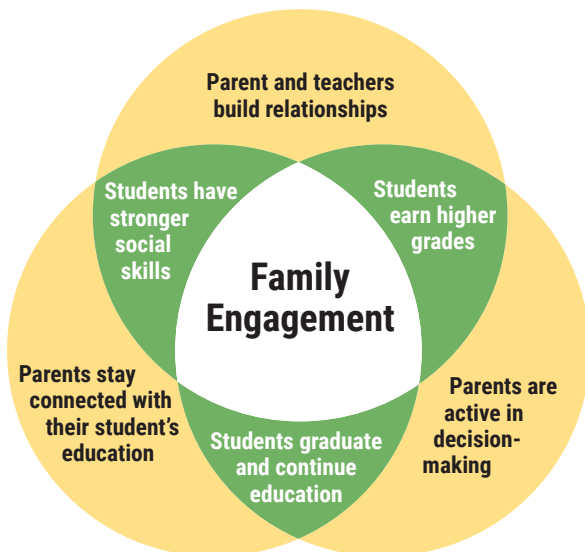
### • Advisory School Councils (ASC)

Every school is required by New Mexico State statute to have an Advisory School Council (ASC), with half of its members representing families and the community, and which supports the principal with school-based decision-making. The ASC provides input on a variety of topics including instructional issues, curricula, budgets, creative ways to involve parents, and other topics, NMSA 22-5-16. (NMPED MLSS Manual 2020 page 50). Schools should reflect on the current purpose and role that the ASC plays in their system. Are there decisions that this group could take an active role in making as a partner with the school staff? Are there additional family or community members who may be valuable partners on the ASC?

### • Empower Parents through Training

Parents will be more engaged when they understand grade-level expectations for students. Schools can adopt a learning-centered approach for both families and students. Consider the workshops that can be provided for parents to help them learn more about what their children are learning at school and to give them tips and tools to better support their kids at home.

» Watch this video to see how one school is [empowering parents through workshops](#).



### • The New Mexico Parent Guide

Provided by the NMPED, this guide offers multiple ideas and links to help parents and caregivers understand how to help their children succeed in school. It is a great resource; however, it may be overwhelming for parents to sift and sort through on their own. Schools could use this resource to plan for and employ mini workshops for parents during Family Engagement nights. These could even be done via ZOOM as virtual trainings.

» Access the online [New Mexico Parent Guide](#).

Here are a few suggestions.

» In the **NM Parent Guide, Section 02, "What Your Child is Learning,"** each grade level could plan a 15-minute parent presentation for a Family Engagement Night, using the information provided in the Parent Guide resource, to explain the grade-level expectations. The presentation could be followed by an interactive lesson during which the parents engage in a learning activity that is like one their child would engage in during a classroom lesson. This 30-minute activity provides parents with information about learning standards as well as practice which will help them to better assist their students at home.

» In the **NM Parent Guide, Section 03, "Keep an Eye on the Future,"** High Schools can use this information during a family engagement night to help parents and students understand graduation requirements. This could be especially helpful to freshmen and their caregivers as they are entering high school for the first time, to understand about earning credits towards graduation. This information is new to them and possibly to parents as well. A face-to-face workshop will allow schools to clearly present this new information, to answer questions in real time for parents and families, and to set a foundation for success for incoming freshmen.

In a nutshell, engaging families in schools includes building relationships, giving them an active role in decision-making, and providing them with opportunities to learn more about their children's education. As highlighted in the NM Engaged Framework, students with engaged parents are more likely to earn higher grades, graduate and go on to post-secondary education and have stronger social skills. Let us commit to keeping our parents involved but to work towards really engaging them in our schools. Together we can build a brighter future for the students of New Mexico.

# Parent and Family Engagement when Providing Layered Supports

Parents can be engaged in their children's education in many different ways, including providing students a quiet time and place for homework, volunteering at school, reading to students, communicating with teachers, participating in parent-teacher conferences, etc. Family engagement in education is a consistent predictor of student success, particularly for family engagement that is focused on student learning. Schools can leverage family engagement to support student learning by providing parents with strategies and skills to help support their children in meeting their learning targets. Parent involvement in the MLSS process is family engagement centered on student learning, and as such, is a high-leverage family engagement activity.

## LAYER 1

Family engagement is highly encouraged but not required. Universal interventions in Layer 1 include communication binders, parent-teacher conferences, sharing student and school data, student-lead data conferences, phone calls for successes, etc.

Parents shall be notified no later than the end of the second grading period that their child is failing to make adequate yearly progress, and a conference consisting of the parent and the teacher shall be held to discuss possible remediation programs available to assist the student. Specific academic deficiencies and remediation strategies shall be explained to the student's parent and a written plan developed which contains timelines, academic expectations, and the measurements to be used to verify that a student has overcome academic deficiencies. Remediation programs and academic improvement programs include tutoring, extended day or week programs,

summer programs, and other research-based models for student improvement (NMSA 22-2C-6).

All districts have an obligation to communicate meaningfully with the parents and family members of English Learners. Such parents must be adequately notified of any program, service, or activity that is brought to the attention of all other parents. A district must have a process to identify parents and provide them with free and effective language assistance which includes translated materials and/or a competent and appropriate interpreter. Students, siblings, friends, and untrained staff members are not considered qualified translators or interpreters (English Learner Toolkit, 2015).

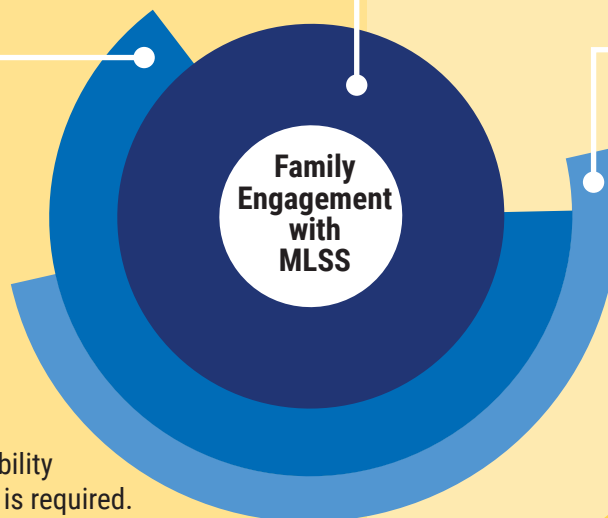
Community representation is recommended on the core team for NM DASH.

If, in Layer 1, there is data gathering to evaluate for disability or giftedness, parent consent is required.

## LAYER 2

Family engagement is highly encouraged but not required. Parents and families should be active participants. Schools are responsible for documenting their efforts to inform families about how parents can participate in the MLSS process.

If, in Layer 2, there is data gathering to evaluate for disability or giftedness, parent consent is required.



## LAYER 3

Family engagement is strongly encouraged but not required. Parents should be active participants in the Layer 3 process and receive progress monitoring updates at least every two weeks.

If, in Layer 3, there is data gathering to evaluate for disability or giftedness, parent consent is required.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**[View MLSS guidance and online resources](#)**

**Contact Kenneth Stowe**

(505) 412-9979 | [multi.layeredss@state.nm.us](mailto:multi.layeredss@state.nm.us)